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Developing learners' lexicon through vocabulary cards

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Developing learners' lexicon through vocabulary cards

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of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in Teaching degree
at the
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the author's process in using flashcards to teach formulaic sequences. First, there is a discussion of the terminology, which ties the term "formulaic sequences" to earlier discussions about the Lexical Approach and collocations. The importance of teaching formulaic sequences is then explored, as a way to build vocabulary and to aid in general skill development. Rote learning through the use of flash cards is then argued for, with a variety of card types presented and compared. The author then discusses the methods by which flash cards have been used to teach formulaic sequences in his own classroom, concluding with a set of best practices that teachers can apply to their own teaching contexts.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Vocabulary

Vocabulary Development

Classroom Techniques

Pattern Drills (Teaching)

Student Developed Materials

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Chapter One

Introduction

Much ado has been made in recent years about the lexical approach and collocation, and specifically, the teaching and acquisition of holistic pre-packaged strings of words, which we will refer to from now as formulaic sequences. These sequences are being seen as a key way to simultaneously build the learners' lexicon, develop fluency, and implicitly introduce grammar through patterns embedded in the sequences. I have spent the last several years working in different contexts in Japan trying to create a lexical syllabus to introduce formulaic sequences, and one strand of this syllabus has been the intensive and systematic use of flashcards.

I first started using vocabulary cards in 2002 at a small language school in Nagano City, Japan. My colleague John Troop took a series of picture cards from *Advanced Communication Games* (Hadfield, 1987, p. 52-53) designed for involving invitations, wrote up the phrases describing each card (e.g., play tennis, go to the movies) and used them for various activities in the classroom. This school ran a children's English program using the Pacific Language School's materials and methodology which was heavily into competitive games and activities centered around flashcards, and I saw this as a natural extension of that program. By having students from junior high school-age on up to adults learn phrases rather than single words, these cards took advantage of the greater cognitive load that could be placed on older students. I was drawn to the fact that students had to learn a chunk of vocabulary (a term I was unfamiliar with at that time) with the rationalization that the phrases were all common enough to be useful to the

students in acquiring fluency. In this context, where students met for one hour a week, we would work through a set of 15 vocabulary cards over the span of four weeks, with a part of each class devoted to simple activities such as written categorizations (e.g., Things I do alone/with other people/I have never done), grammar drills (e.g., present perfect: *Have you ever played tennis? No, I haven't*) and memory games (tic-tac-toe, Othello). The students liked the cards and the language and so, after two months when the printed cards had been used, they were asked to make their own using phrases of things they liked to do or had to do for work.

I left this job in the fall of 2002 and immediately took the CELTA. As a passing note, the teacher mentioned the Lexical Approach. Perhaps because of my experience with using vocabulary cards, I began to do further research and found that the ideas that Michael Lewis presented in *The Lexical Approach* (1993) and *Implementing the Lexical Approach* (1997) matched what I had been doing and gave me the confidence to expand on it.

In my latest teaching context, I was using the cards in a much more intensive manner, appropriate to the amount of available class time and the learning load that the students could reasonably be expected to carry. At the time, I was contracted to teach for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Nagano, Japan. JICA functions much as the American Peace Corps in that they send volunteers to various developing countries around the world. These volunteers are required to live at one of two remote training centers and attend language classes for up to five hours a day, six days a week for a period of ten weeks. In addition to language classes, the students attend various workshops, seminars and lectures to prepare them for living and working overseas. The students are between the ages of 20 and 69 and have varying levels of L2 ability upon entrance. Once at the center, they are tested and placed according to their language ability in classes of four to eight students. In the English

department, they receive 166 hours of general English and 45 hours of technical English instruction. Every effort is made to group technical students according to their dispatch assignments, such as nursing, science and mathematics education, and computer technology. These 45 hours of technical English consisted of mainly vocabulary input, presentation skills, and practice. Classes were held Monday through Saturday, and in this context, my students were required to study a new set of fifteen formulaic sequence flashcards for each of the eight middle weeks (I often skipped a week near the end to allow them to catch up with their other class and training center duties), the first and last week being shortened and primarily concerning administrative duties for a grand total of either 105 or 120 cards¹.

While this paper will concentrate on the use of flashcards, it is important to note that this is only one strand of a lexical syllabus. A complete program would also include elements such as noticing and selecting activities, guessing meaning from context, comparisons to chunking in L1, work with the lexis that occurs through class discussion, and a lexical notebook to record and recycle other formulaic sequences that students encounter in the materials used in class. The use of authentic materials is also highly recommended to provide students with rich and contextualized examples from which to work.

The original intent of the flashcards was to provide a method whereby a great deal of vocabulary could be studied intensively, regularly, and in a structured manner so that it could be learned with the greatest possible economy and still result in automaticity as well as an implicit knowledge of the grammar embedded within the lexis. In this way, the rules and patterns may be disseminated and reconstructed in novel ways according to the learners' needs but still within the frame and fluency that the formulaic sequence provides.

¹ See Appendix 1 for the 120 formulaic sequences used in my last term and examples of flashcards.

This paper will largely deal with what I have learned about using flashcards to teach formulaic sequences in this last context. We will see how modern research into formulaic sequences and vocabulary acquisition relates to what I have done and we will also hear from several former students about their experiences in using the flashcards and their views on the impact of these techniques. I will offer alternative activities and approaches based on what the researchers in the field have written, along with my own views based on how it has played out in my classroom.

Terminology

The importance of teaching vocabulary in units larger than single words has been discussed since the mid-19th century (Wray, 2002, p. 7) and along with that discussion have come numerous ways to classify and name these units of meaning. In Wray (2002, p. 9), over 50 terms are listed as having been used at one time or another, some with overlapping meanings but all of them trying to label some part of these phenomena. For our purposes, we will use the umbrella term ‘formulaic sequences’ with Wray’s definition:

a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar (2002, p. 9).

For students, I have found the term ‘chunk’, as in lexical chunk, to be adequate when referring to formulaic sequences. ‘Chunk’ can be visualized nicely by the students and easily explained as a piece of language often longer than single words that act together to create meaning. I would avoid overloading the students with confusing metalanguage such as poly-word, praxons, phrasal lexemes, and so on as this language would provide little benefit other

than adding greater confusion to a rather simple in-class concept. One possible exception to this is that I have found it helpful at more advanced levels if the students know the word ‘collocation’ and have been trained to the point where they can ask for word partners of new words as they occur in the classroom.

Through various activities, students come to understand that ‘chunks’ cover a wide variety of pattern types but that the key importance is that certain combinations of words work together to encapsulate a meaning. Once learners grasp this concept, they are able to begin to notice the ubiquity of the phenomena which will in time enable them to discover and acquire formulaic language autonomously.

In my classes, I have concentrated on using flashcards to present and practice three kinds of formulaic sequences:

1. The mainstay of my program has been complex predicates, which are verb-fronted sequences that contain objects (*analyze living situations, prepare materials for class*) and may or may not be followed by a prepositional phrase (*send e-mails to my family* vs. *take attendance*). They are formulaic in that the parts are frequently-occurring verb + noun, verb + particle, noun + prepositional phrase collocations.
2. The next category, phrasal lexemes, is what Lewis would refer to as fixed expressions (2002, p. 9) and Willis would call a sentence (2003, p. 148). These sequences are better learned as one unit as they often serve in social interactions to keep the conversation flowing (Schmitt and Carter, 2004, p. 9-10). Many of these I have taught based on my knowledge of the frequency of the L1 equivalent that my Japanese students use inside of class (e.g., *That makes sense, What can you do?*) to show emotion or understanding during interactions.

3. Semi-fixed expressions (Lewis, 2002, p. 11) make up the third category. These are often sentence heads, or starters, with slots that can be filled in with new information at the end of the sentence. In my class, these have mainly been so-called classroom English (*Could you speak more slowly/loudly/clearer? What does ____ mean?*) and what my students have to come to know as discussion chunks: sentence heads that occurred from the students' needs to collaborate, agree and disagree when putting together a class project (*I agree with in part, but..., Can I see a show of hands if...*).

We will explore these categories in the next section more thoroughly.

Chapter Two

Rationale for teaching formulaic sequences

Whereas it was previously possible to imagine that words combined fairly freely... it is now clear that... no such piecemeal and superimposed explanation is possible. Words belong to words not as an afterthought but at the most fundamental level (Wray, 2002, p. 13)

As late as 1980, vocabulary was largely ignored in language acquisition research. (Meara, 1980). Within seven years, the situation had changed (Schmitt, 1997, p. 1) with a great deal having been published, and indeed the spotlight is now aimed very directly on vocabulary with the focus having been broadened to include areas where vocabulary and grammar seem inseparable (Nation, 1997, p. 170). The belief that vocabulary was merely an afterthought to be added on to a grammatical skeleton has been largely debunked or even reversed: Lewis proclaimed that “language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar (1997, p. 13). Earlier approaches which led teachers to the belief that vocabulary does not need explicit attention and that learners should pick up the required lexis through inference and other implicit means have also been discredited. Within these approaches, students lacked the proper amount of explanation concerning meaning and form, didn’t retain the new lexis, and when left to infer meaning, often came to the wrong conclusions (Sökmen, 1997, p. 238). We can now safely assume that vocabulary growth is important enough for language acquisition that it warrants being “planned for, deliberately controlled and monitored” (Nation, 1995-6, p. 7) within our language programs.

Sinclair has proposed (1991, p. 114) that there are two principles governing how we interpret language: the open-choice principle and the more dominant idiom principle. The open-choice principle supposes that words are available one by one to fill our linguistic needs, especially in new situations where our store of ready-made language is incapable of expressing what is demanded. The idiom principle says that semi-preconstructed pieces of language of two or more words are available at other times. He states: “The first mode to be applied is the idiom principle since most of the text will be interpretable by this principle. Whenever there is good reason, the interpretive process switches to the open-choice principle and back again. Lexical choices which are unexpected in their environment will presumably occasion a switch”.

This is important to consider in the face of the traditional belief which was that language was processed in a single step-by-step manner where words and grammar were processed and added one at a time. Sinclair’s dual-processing belief allows for both the creation of formulaic sequences to express notions fluently and accurately while also making allowances for being able to express novelty. Dual-processing would also account for the speed at which we are able to communicate. Sportscasters and auctioneers, who rely on speed to deal with the high pace that is demanded of them, use formulaic sequences to a notably high degree (Kuiper, 2004, p. 42). Using these pre-made structures allows for greater speed because the speaker does not have to process each word and grammatical structure piece by piece. With the idiom principle as the dominant processor, a great deal of information can be communicated in a short space of time without an overburdening cognitive load. Studies that measure eye-speed when processing written information confirm that formulaic sequences are indeed processed more rapidly (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008, p. 85). Finally, we can see how Sinclair’s theory serves to elevate formulaticity to the forefront in terms of importance of how we deal with the language that we

encounter and use. Complementing Sinclair's dual-processing is Crick's (1979) theory that we have a limited ability to process but that we have a vast ability to store things in our brains, such as formulaic sequences. By having a huge store of this ready-made language available, we are able to produce fluent utterances by recalling whole strings of language, thus saving our limited processing capacity for dealing with other cognitive tasks, such as humorous wordplay and organization of content (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 230). As Willis states, "We don't have time to apply complex grammatical rules to create utterances in real time, so we are dependent on lexical phrases" (2003, p. 149).

So how much of our language is made up of formulaic sequences? Estimates vary according to different studies, each employing different research tools (Wray, 2002, p. 28). One study which was based on corpus findings would have these sequences accounting for around 60% of spoken discourse. It has even been suggested that native speakers know more formulaic sequences than they do single words. (Schmitt, 2004, p. 1). To give a brief example of this, consider the word *way*. When run through an online concordancer such the Collins-Cobuild², we come up with numerous examples of formulaic sequences containing the single word *way*:

```

do not in any way represent
run your business in a professional way
we weren't in his way
there was no way out
found a way
recovery is still a long way away
it takes me an hour each way
the only way to
In this way
I mean in a way that was like a counseling session

```

The case could be made that for each of the above examples, a typical native speaker will have a stored sequence available so that when the situation arises where a particular *way* sequence is

² <http://www.collins.co.uk/corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>

needed, it will be available in an unanalyzed and automatic way. When a speaker wants to communicate a negation emphatically, the formula {not + in any way + empty slot (verb/adjective)} is available. From this concordance excerpt alone, we can find 10 distinct sequences containing the key word. Subsequently, our lexicon must be huge, made up of hundreds of thousands of these ready-made utterances (Pawley & Syder in Schmitt, 2004, p. 1). And it again highlights our responsibility to make our students aware of this and to teach methods for dealing with this huge lexicon. Our learners need to have a large store of these sequences on hand to be able to understand and produce them in real time. Flashcards could be one very useful part of this.

Another point that our above example illustrates is the teaching of high frequency words. *Way* is one of the top 200 words in terms of frequency of use³. Research tells us that 90% of the English used in informal conversation comes from the top 2000 most frequent words (as well as 80% of academic texts and newspapers and 87% of novels) (Nation, 2001, p. 22). This informs us of the importance of concentrating on these high frequency words that make up the bulk of our communication before working with less frequently occurring lexis. From a cost vs. benefit view, “high frequency words are so essential that the ‘cost’ of teaching them is justified by the resulting benefit” (Nation in Schmitt, 1997, p. 203). But when our students research one of these words in the dictionary, they often find long and contradictory definitions that do not always address the phrasal nuances. Sinclair addresses this by saying, “there is a broad tendency for frequent words, or frequent senses of words, to have less of a clear and independent meaning than less frequent words or senses” (1991, p. 113). He argues that these high frequency words often become delexicalized and are better analyzed within the phrase.

³ Lemmatized frequency list from the British National Corpus: <http://www.kilgariff.co.uk/BNClists/lemma.num> or Michael West’s 1953 General Service List: <http://jbauman.com.gsl.html>

Lewis restates this by saying, “In general, the more de-lexicalised a word is, and the wider its collocational range, the more important it is to meet, acquire and record it in a Collocation or Expression” (1997, p. 48). In my experience, the collocational complex predicates my students learn often provide enough context for the learners to recognize both meaning and use. I have been careful to use a large stock of these high frequency words within all three types of the sequences mentioned above. Nation reaffirms this by saying, “as a way of quickly developing fluency and picking up native-like expressions, groups of words should be learned as units. This learning is made easier in most cases if the meanings of the single words that make up the multiword units are also understood” (2003, p. 131). An analysis of the 8 sets of 15 formulaic sequences that my students studied in my last term at JICA confirms this; 88% of the single words fall within the top 2000 most frequently used words. 3% are in the Academic Word List (needed by students studying in English language universities) while the remainder fell outside of these bounds⁴. But of this remaining 9%, half are loan words familiar to Japanese while the other half were chosen because of their relevance to their upcoming volunteer lives. These include such things as country names and necessary vocabulary such as *math*, *dialect*, *coworkers*, *mosquito* and *Kava*. Studies of class materials for frequency can be conducted on-line through the Compleat Lexical Tutor⁵.

Even if all of the words in a formulaic sequence are not known to a learner, when presented within the sequence, the sequence itself can act as a mnemonic device for the unknown word (Schmitt, 1997, p. 215). This would be a good method of introducing lower frequency or academic words to students, whether the learners are of a higher level or studying English for specific purposes.

⁴ The full analysis is available in Appendix 2

⁵ <http://www.lex tutor.ca/>

The collocations and prepositional phrases embedded within the complex predicates that I began using in 2002 and which I intuited to be significant for my students' learning is then verified by what teachers and researchers in England had already grasped. Finding the work of Michael Lewis, among others, encouraged me to continue teaching formulaic sequences, both as I had been doing with flashcards, but also in a much more far-reaching manner.

Another benefit that has been cited for the acquisition of this kind of lexis is that it helps enable social discourse. Sequences that are common in spoken discourse have been common in guidebooks, survival guides, and textbooks for many years and it is this type of language that can keep a conversation flowing. Members of a particular speech group use these expressions and expect to hear them in normal conversation. Whether this is a function, such as apologizing, asking for directions, asking for clarification, haggling, or it is the use of phatic expressions to keep casual conversation going, not for transactional purposes but merely for keeping and developing social relationships, sequences such as these are widespread and should be made known to students. It has been posited that mastery of these kinds of expressions can lead to quicker integration into communities of speakers which will also lead to greater volumes of target language input (Schmitt, 2004, p. 11). I have made a conscious effort to introduce this kind of language to my students, often stemming from equivalent L1 expressions that the students use frequently outside (and to my horror, inside) of class. These include:

- Back-channel devices: *That makes sense. What can you do? That figures.*
- Encouragement phrases: *Get it done. Take your time. Tell me about it.*
- Social functions: *Can I pick anything up for you? I'm not going to be able to make it. That really suits you! It's up to you.*
- Greetings: *Long time no see.*

- Work phrases: *I'll see what I can do. I'm sorry, but it's out of the question.*
- Sarcastic responses: *I've had enough. What are you going on about?*

The prevalence of these phrases in L1, in this case Japanese, makes them especially memorable due to the high motivation the students have towards learning them. Normally, formulaic sequences can be initially introduced without analyzing the internal structures but in this last example, “long time no see,” it will be necessary to point out that it is both fixed (we cannot say, “long time no hear”) and ungrammatical. If left unanalyzed, the learner is apt to make generalizations such as the example in the previous sentence and to also try and make the sequence fit with what they already know about English, such as this example from one of my former students, Yuko, who in response to a survey question that asked her which flashcard was the most memorable for her, responded:

Long time no see you. Because sometimes I use this word⁶.*

If the teacher knows of L1 examples that also display ungrammaticality in chunk form or can elicit some, it may be helpful for consciousness-raising to make the learners aware that they also exist in the first language and are perfectly acceptable. It is interesting to note that Yuko refers to the above sequence as a word. Has she internalized the fact that it is a chunk and therefore has the same semantic properties of a single word, or has she simply made a mistake with plurals?

The final point that we will look at concerns what our brain does when a sequence is learned holistically and without having its constituent parts analyzed. Nation has stated that most vocabulary that is subject to language-focused learning will be immediately available as implicit knowledge because it will not need to go through a developmental process (1997, p.

⁶ I have included quotes from several students; these are responses to a survey that I sent to them about their feelings about studying from flashcards. An example of the survey and responses can be found in Appendix 3.

176). While he was referring to single words, we can extrapolate this to some formulaic sequences, especially those that do not challenge the learners' interlanguage. With the majority of formulaic language, the embedded patterns are grammatical and the sequence just needs to be slotted into the stream of conversation where necessary. Yorio's (1989) research contradicts this, having found that "expressions learned as formulas subsequently developed errors consistent with the interlanguage. Observations like this suggest that adult learners may find it difficult to suppress the tendency to break down linguistic input, even when they know that it is not necessary or advisable to do so" (Wray in Schmitt, 2004, p. 251). If this is true, then we need to develop strategies to both reinforce the formulacity of the taught sequences (extensive reading is often mentioned to take on this role) and to deal with the errors we can expect to emerge. While it is certainly advisable to train our learners to not analyze this kind of input unnecessarily, we also do not want to stifle the process of segmentation, in which Peters (1983) believes unanalyzed sequences are eventually analyzed into individual words. In the segmentation process, it is thought that first the formulaic sequence is learned and then it is treated to a limited analysis. When this happens, part of the sequence remains unanalyzed while another part is recognized as a changeable slot. Other language is then available to be repositioned into the original sequence. Finally, all of the parts of the sequence are available for analysis as words and grammar. Peters suggests that much of our language is acquired in this way (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 229-30). I have seen evidence of this in my own classroom, usually in the latter weeks of the course, where phrases from the complex predicate cards have been slightly altered to match new information. What has been truly amazing to observe is the fluency that remains in the sequence and the accuracy with which it is used. We can see anecdotal evidence

of this process in some of the feedback I have received from former students, namely when I asked them to either name the cards that they remembered or found most memorable:

hang out, get stressed about, let me know sth, stay at home, have a look at sth (Yasuko)

teach a class on ... (Taisuke)

let my students know how... (Kuniko)

I'm using many phrases that I learned from vocabulary cards. For instance, "air out," "make up," "settle down," etc. (Koji)

What each of the above examples shows us is that the process of segmentation is taking place in that the students are remembering part of the complex predicate, such as the verb + particle (preposition or adverb), but leaving the rest of the learned phrase off. It is important to note that the grammar has been retained in each of the above examples, so that when the student needs to recall the formula, the requisite grammar will not need to be processed as it is already well-formed within the chunk. Three students specifically commented on this process:

I can remember many of [the] pictures and the pieces of the sentences. (Kazuko)

I can use proper phrases in various situations, especially I don't make mistake in using prepositions. (Taisuke)

I can use these phrases frequently. When I exchange some words of the vocabulary card I can make new phrases. I don't have to think about grammar when I use these phrases. (Yuho)

I would speculate that most learners are not aware enough when it comes to the language they are acquiring to be able to comment at length on the processes that are occurring as they

acquire language. In my own class, as I stated above, I have seen evidence of this segmentation but usually not until the final weeks of the term and certainly not in every student. We probably would not even be able to notice the vast majority of the re-segmented formulas from spoken or written production and I am aware of no research that has tried to study this complex process. Obviously, these sequences would be implicitly analyzed at different times depending on individual factors but I would hazard a guess that within the short amount of time I had with my students, the segmentation process had only just begun and what takes place in the students' next living situation will be far greater than what I could observe in class, depending on many factors such as motivation, learning style, and if the student is actually using English or not.

Wood gives us a nice summary of two of the benefits of formulaic sequences: "They are acquired and retained in and of themselves, linked to pragmatic competence and expanded as this aspect of communicative ability and awareness develops. At the same time, they are segmented and analyzed, broken down, and combined as cognitive skills of analysis and synthesis grow. Both the original formulas and pieces and rules that come from analysis are retained" (2002, p. 5).

It is certainly encouraging to see evidence of segmentation at work as well as the overwhelmingly positive feedback I have received from this group of students in regards to teaching formulaic sequences. They are acquiring language that is useful and available now, and patterns and rules that will serve them in the future.

Chapter Three

Rationale for using flashcards

Forget all of the criticism you have heard about rote learning and translation; research has repeatedly shown that such learning is very effective (Nation, 2005, p. 6)

For some, the idea of rote memorization conjures up images of humorless, behaviorist classrooms where the students interacted only with the teacher whose job it was to create language habits by endless repetitions of patterns, devoid of personal meaning or context. The Communicative Approach effectively deposed this style of teaching and in doing so, cleaned the slate in terms of effective ways to teach language. Rote memorization met such an end, but it is back; research has shown that the use of word lists and flashcards to be highly effective and that “the average learner was able to master large numbers of words using this technique and the learning did not wear off quickly” (Nation in Schmitt, 1997, p. 210) and in fact, there is evidence to suggest that certain students, namely Asians, prefer rote learning (Schmitt, 1997, p. 202). I certainly had little trouble rationalizing using flashcards with my students; they were accustomed to using them from their school days, when they had to learn the thousands of *Kanji* required to pass high school and university entrance exams. It is a common sight in Japan to see business men and women on the train, flipping through a stack of flashcards to learn what is required for a new position or contract. While the Communicative Approach’s insistence on contextualizing vocabulary is intuitively attractive, Nation argues that this in fact makes meaning less transparent; by presenting lexis out of context we are able to give more attention to the various

meanings of words as well as use collocational additives to give usage clues and help find the parts of speech (1982, p. 22).

One way to make rote memorization less agonizing for the student is to present vocabulary that somehow fits their personal needs. Laufer (2005, p. 3) suggests teachers create their own lexical syllabi based on their teaching materials, frequency lists, and the learners' specific needs. I have done this in three ways: 1) I have compiled new sets from frequently used L1 expressions, 2) I have given the students edited complex predicates based on their homework responses (e.g., list five things you will do for your volunteer job, list five things you will do in your free time), and 3) The students have selected formulaic sequences that occurred during class discussions. The individual lists are gathered and then a class set is made. Problems arose in some terms when cards from previous classes were used:

I did not use these sentences [from the] vocabulary cards ... maybe students should make their own vocabulary cards which use the sentences they learned and drew ... by themselves.

(Toshiaki)

As a response to this, now, when the new class list is handed out the students have the option of picking which flashcards are useful, discarding the less useful and making new cards that better fit their needs. In many ways, this would mirror Haggard's Self-Collection Strategy which intends to increase learner motivation by having the students select which lexis they are going to concentrate on (in Sökmen, p. 240-241).

Students could also decide to change some of the cards depending on whether the tone and register fit their needs. Hidekazu commented on this by saying, “I think one of the important things is whether the card’s content ... is appropriate for own lifestyle or character”.

For the students, the true measure of the worth of collecting phrases like this was discovered once they reached the countries they had been dispatched to. The response was decidedly positive:

I used some cards right away when I arrived in [my] dispatch country. (Mika)

I use 50% of the phrases in my daily life, ex. “Long time no see”, “I have had enough” and “It is up to you”. (Mitsuko)

It’s very helpful for my job and my life now. (Tsuyoshi)

I’ve used some chunks daily, and some of them come to my mind help me when I get stuck. (Yasuko)

What I learned from vocabulary cards is useful because the selection suits ... my daily life. (Yuhō)

I chose to compile the students’ individual phrases into class sets of 15 cards in order to lighten their workload (instead of being responsible for 105-120 chunks over the course of a term, they were responsible for 10-15) knowing that they could change or discard ones that did not match their needs. I also thought that there would be enough motivation to learn their classmates’ phrases that they would not be discouraged if some of the phrases weren’t altogether personalized. Knowing that the process of segmentation would eventually make less personalized phrases still linguistically useful also encouraged me to continue making class sets.

In the end, I felt that for the majority of my students I had found the correct balance between immediate usefulness, long-term benefits, and workload:

I really enjoyed using those cards to learn new vocabulary. I could remember so many words by those. It's an amazing idea to let us remember new vocabulary! If I can say something for your future teaching ... half of those vocabulary, I didn't use in Fiji. I think the reason was almost all of them were not common vocabulary because you let us make those words according to our own fields. So, I used "my" vocabulary a lot, but I didn't use others. [However] I think that to know other fields' sentences is also very important. (Sachiko)

One change that I did not strongly implement until after Sachiko and Toshiaki had already been dispatched was to have students do more to personalize their vocabulary. The complex predicates can usually be easily adjusted for individual necessity; slots in the sequence can be changed, and the phrasal lexemes can be replaced with more suitable versions. When I have assigned the semi-fixed expressions, it has always been up to each student to choose which ones they want to study most.

Putting vocabulary onto flashcards has several advantages over other methods, such as word lists, lexical notebooks, or the cluttered but all-too-common classroom notebook that is a jumble of unorganized notes. Flashcards can be organized and re-organized to concentrate on more immediately-useful/difficult-to-remember sequences. New information can be added to the cards. They are easy and cheap to create and personalize. They can be taken anywhere and studied at any time, even to the amusement of passersby:

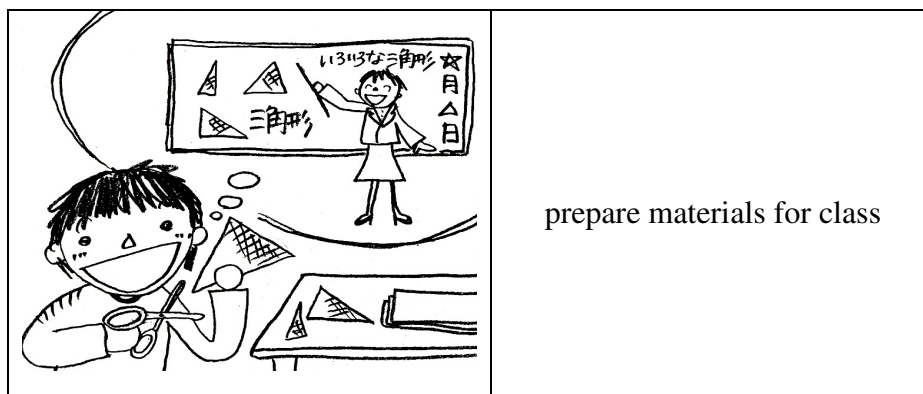
About once a month when I wait for a bus, I try [going through my flashcards]. But everybody who sits next to me, they start giggling. (Chieko)

The simplest form flashcards take is simply to have the L1 translation on one side and the formulaic sequence on the other:

やっぱりね!	That figures!
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This is rote memorization at its most basic and although unattractive to the modern language teacher for the obvious lack of usage clues or connection to meaning-based processes, it still seems to be the preferred method for my students once they have left the classroom. One benefit from the learners' perspective is that they are the easiest to make and also coincide with how they learned English in school, language education in Japan being more immune to modern approaches than other countries and still steeped in translation-heavy methods. We will later discuss learner strategy training in regards to these techniques.

The original cards I used from *Advanced Communication Games* and the majority of what I have had my students create subsequently were picture cards, with illustrations on one side that somehow conveyed the meaning of the formulaic sequence which were written by the students on the opposite side:



These images, especially those created or modified by the students would provide a greater depth of analysis and create more associations to help with retention which follows the general principles of the “levels of processing theory” (Craig & Lockhart in Nation, 1982, p. 27). The dual-coding theory of human memory states that “the mind contains a network of verbal and imaginal representations for words” (Sökmen, 1997, p. 244) where the image created by the student, in their head or on a flashcard, makes recall easier. It is also the case that pictures that the students draw themselves will be more memorable due to the personal investment exerted in drawing the pictures (Sökmen, 1997, p. 247). In the end, the picture on the card literally becomes the image in the students’ head when a particular piece of lexis is recalled.

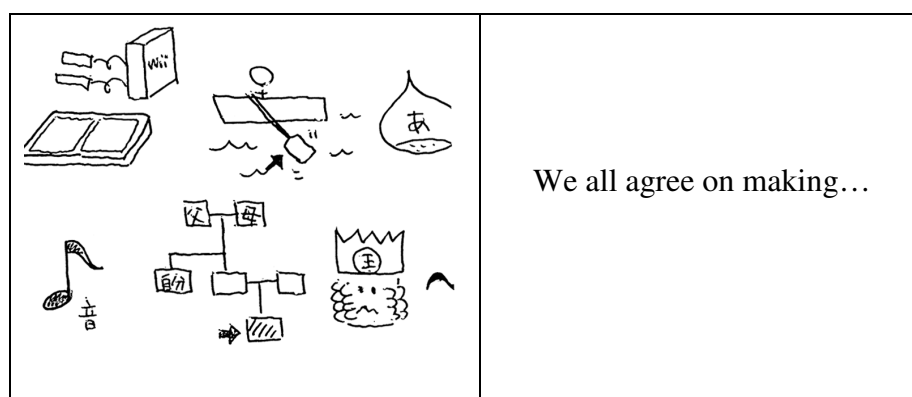
When we try to speak English, first some image was coming up to my head, then the image was translated to the words and my mouth made the voice. (Makoto)

That really helps me a lot especially automatic English speaking. To tell the truth, it’s not automatic yet but when I want to say something, the picture comes up my mind and my mouth moves. (Yasuko)

While I originally intuited it to be true that pictures would be more effective than translation, this may not actually be substantiated by the research: “Pictures and translations have different effects and so should be regarded as complementary sources of meaning rather than

alternatives” (Nation, 1982, p. 28). Research conducted by Kellogg and Howe found that out of a class of 82 students, the majority learned significantly better with pictures rather than words. But for 25 of those students, the opposite was true (in Nation, 1982, p. 28). The message being that both methods need to be taken into account and in the future I will have my students who wish to do so write the L1 translation on the same side of the card as the picture, although the translation has already been written down on the list of phrases. We will explore this more deeply in the next section.

For the semi-fixed expressions that emerged from class discussions, I had my students draw rebus puzzles such as this:



In a rebus puzzle, pictures are used to represent words and sounds. In the above example, we have a Nintendo Wii + oar + the Hiragana character for “ah” in a chestnut (*aguri*) + a musical note (*on-pu*, so take the first syllable on) + the family tree symbol for niece, which in Japanese is *mei* + a king. It is a way to represent more abstract formulaic sequences that simple pictures might not be able to do. The one drawback is that the meaning itself might be obscured, so an L1 translation under the picture or in the students’ notebooks may be of use.

The keyword technique is another mnemonic device designed to aid in retention of lexis (Nation, 2003, p. 15). In this case, a picture is drawn (or a mental image is created) representing

an image that sounds like the word in L1 along with an image representing the meaning. In the example below, my student wanted to remember the phrasal verb *freak out*.



The pronunciation trigger consists of many sounds, which in this instance will all come from the student's L1, Japanese. The figures in the drawing turn towards each other (*furimuku*) as the nine (*kyu*) unexpectedly meets (*au*) the ten (when counting by twos in Japanese, 10 is *to*). This gives the student an approximate pronunciation in *furi-kyu-au-to*. The second part of the keyword is a meaning-based image, which we can see represented by the emotional reaction of the ten. The immense effort that the student spent in both imagining and drawing the illustration gives the vocabulary a considerable amount of cognitive depth. The student has also incorporated their intense fear of snakes in the figure of the nine, thereby adding an affective element to the picture which would make the image and ultimately, the lexis, much more memorable. The keyword technique may not be appropriate for all lexis; it is often hard to approximate the pronunciation of a foreign word into English. That being said, "numerous experiments on the keyword technique for learning foreign vocabulary have shown that the technique increases the efficiency of vocabulary learning by around twenty-five percent" (Nation, 2003, p. 15). This technique need not be applied to all new vocabulary that the learners encounter but it may be particularly helpful for lexis that students are having difficulty in remembering.

For both rebus puzzles and the keyword technique, it is advisable to set aside class time to create these, as simply telling the students what to do will not lead to the required results. Nation agrees, “Learners need to practice thinking of keywords for at least ten different foreign words under the guidance of the teacher” (2003, p. 15).

Low frequency words and words from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) can either be introduced embedded within longer sequences or on Nation’s (1982, 1998, 2003) word cards which feature a simple L1 translation on one side and the English and necessary information on the other. I would expand the information on the English side to include the phonemic symbols to aid in pronunciation, other members of the word family, example sentences, common collocations, and highlighted morphemes such as roots or affixes, if applicable. I would recommend these word cards as an addition to a program of formulaic sequences and for those this style fits, such as university students. The great amount of information included would necessitate a larger card. Here is an example with the word *compensate*:

<p>賠償する</p>	<p>Compensate (v) /kəmˈpenseɪt/</p> <p>¹ remove/reduce the bad effect of sth ADV. amply, fully more than <i>The advantages of the scheme more than compensate for the risks associated with it. partially, partly</i> PREP. for ² pay money for a loss/injury ADV. adequately, properly fully, in full <i>People whose health has suffered will be compensated in full. financially I expect to be compensated financially.</i> PREP. for <i>The company will compensate you for the losses you have suffered.</i>⁷ Adj: compensatory /kəmˈpenˌsəˌtɔːri/</p>
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⁷ From the Oxford Collocations Dictionary Online at: <http://llohe-ocd.appspot.com/>

Once the cards have been drawn and initial meaning has been established then it can mainly be a case of repetition to convert this lexis to intake, available for later use and the processes of segmentation. Research has shown that the “more stimuli are repeated in short-term memory, the greater the long-term memory for these items, and in turn, the easier they are to repeat as sequences in short-term memory” (Ellis, 1997, p. 125). A student needs between 5 and 16 (or more) exposures to a word before it is learned (Nation in Schmitt, 1997, p. 217) and an optimal spacing of exposures has been set at 5-10 minutes after the first class, then 24 hours later, one week later, one month later and finally six months later (Russell in Schmitt, 1997, p. 216). While this spacing may be fine for single words and for other contexts, I do not have that length of time at my disposal and have yet to develop a system to recycle vocabulary at such intervals. Instead, I have found it beneficial to expect much more intensive study of the cards over the 10 weeks, with card specific activities in 4 or 5 of the six weekly classes with a review of all of the cards from the term once a week. Nation (2003, p. 14) also suggests having the learners say the lexis aloud as they study, write collocations on the cards and change the order to the pack as necessary. Students should be shown what is expected of them and also have the rationale explained. This gives them a greater sense of control over their studies, as does the creating or modifying the phrases and cards. Another strategy is to force the students to perform at faster than their normal speed (Nation, 1995-96, p. 10) in order for fluency to improve. One way to accomplish this, as well as to increase repetition, is through testing, as it “forces most learners to revise their work and to make a conscious effort at recall” (O’Dell, 1997, p. 276). The system I have developed includes three quizzes per week; the first is written and meant to focus the students on the written form and grammatical accuracy while the latter two are oral and timed for automaticity. The second oral quiz includes all of the cards that the students have studied, but

with a two-minute time limit. It is impossible to say 120 or even 80 of the formulaic sequences in this short amount of time but it marks a standard by which they can measure their own improvement from week to week and places pressure on them to perform at faster-than-natural speeds.

One goal of using flashcards is to show the students a simple and effective way to learn a large amount of vocabulary quickly so that once out of the classroom setting, they can use the same strategies to continue learning English, or in the case of several of my former students, the local dialect or pidgin. The different methods of creating cards as well as the reasoning for oral and written repetition should be explained so the students have a clear idea of what the advantages are of doing it this way. We have no control over whether these strategies are later used and research has been inconclusive on the long-term effects of learner strategy training (Schmitt, 1997, p. 234) but this should not discourage us from trying. It is also important to let students choose which strategies best work for them, out of the many options we have given them in class. The most successful students “were selective in their use of several learning strategies. They were able to apply them to the appropriate words with good results” (Nation, 1982, p. 26). Reading through the surveys that my former students sent me, I was at first discouraged by how few of them had continued to make and use flashcards but there were some telling signs that they had taken away the strategies they wanted and adapted them to their own styles:

When I was in Pakistan, I had made a lot of cards, these number were more [than] 600 pieces. But these cards were without pictures: the face side is English, the opposite one is Japanese because drawing pictures is so tough for me. (Makoto)

Hiroshi developed his own strategy, which was to take a word and make a new vocabulary card for each of its uses within a formulaic sequence:

I've made vocabulary card about 1,000 in Vanuatu. I continue vocabulary card every day. I'm using NHK TV easy text, such as 100 words corpus. It's my pleasure to speak loud and memorize the useful vocabulary chunk everyday between my apartment and school.

For example, today's word is "follow" and the vocabulary is as follows:

- 1. Follow the instructions carefully.*
- 2. Are you following me?*
- 3. I got your e-mail but I forgot to follow it up.*
- 4. ...*
- 10. I just follow the pattern?*

Like these, there are 100 words and each word has about 10 simple chunks.

This method ensures that Hiroshi gains a wide understanding of the key word and also a huge store of formulaic sequences which should assist in his work as a high school PC instructor.

Chapter Four

Procedure

What follows is a description of the basic method that I have been developing for using flashcards to introduce formulaic sequences in order to build my learners' lexicon in my last teaching context. As stated before, my home class met for 3-5 hours, six days a week. Adjustments will need to be made for your own class's needs.

Gathering the lexis

Complex predicates: After the first set which I have given them from either a past group of JICA students or from a more generalized set, depending on the level, the students' homework is to come back the next day with 15 predicates that relate to their job, their upcoming volunteer life, instructions they will likely give to their future audience, or specialized technical predicates. I collect these and then edit them for grammar and vocabulary, choosing words of higher frequency or what I intuit to be of greater utility. I then mark each predicate that is usable for that student with one symbol and predicates that would be useful for the whole class or easily modifiable so that they can be made useful for each individual with another symbol. The students are then given blank cards and assigned to make drawings for only those marked for the class set; the others can be drawn in upcoming weeks if cards on the new sets do not match their needs. After a couple of days, I collect the drawings and then put them together to make the new class sets.

Phrasal lexemes: Many of these come from knowing the L1 and then it is simply a case of jotting down what the students exclaim, mutter or say during class activities. I had my first term of JICA students make a set of these cards and that one set seemed to cover a healthy portion of the off-the-cuff remarks they would make. In the past, I only had my students study one set of these but if I were to go back to the same context, I would make one more set. This is a way to directly respond to our students immediate language needs and is a positive step towards creating an English-only environment. It would only take a week or two for a responsive and mindful teacher to be able to come up with 30 such phrases.

Semi-fixed expressions: In my context, these mainly sprang from language-focused work at the end of class discussions. My students were required to create a product of some sort and all of the scheduling, decision making, and task assigning had to take place in class in English. I would sit in the back of the class and take notes on language use among other things. From these notes, we would then look at the language and decide on upgraded or alternate wordings of what the students had said. These were to be entered into the students' lexical notebooks and after a few more weeks of this, the students could choose which of the expressions from the notebook were most useful but not yet automatic. Flashcards were then individually created based on these choices. In the future, I would add a set of classroom English expressions from the very start of the term. This language is essential both in and out the classroom for students to gain control over the input they are receiving, but the expressions are long and intimidating for students to use, which makes them ideal as formulaic sequences for automatization.

Friday: Introducing the lexis

There are many ways to initially introduce the formulaic sequences. I try to vary how this is done from week to week in order to focus on different skills and to keep the students interested in the process. I want to make sure that meaning, form, and use have all been covered on this first day, so that when the students leave for the weekend they have a clear idea of each sequence along with the L1 translation, proper spelling, what register the sequence is appropriate for, parts of speech, essential collocations, pronunciation, and various forms of the verb. At the end of class, each student will have one worksheet with the formulaic sequences in the order that they appear on a sheet of uncut cards, which they also receive and are responsible for cutting up and organizing. Below are some basic activities I have used and found successful to introduce the complex predicates and phrasal lexemes.

After each activity, be careful to do consolidation work so that all of the requirements listed above are met, such as finding the appropriate L1 translation and the different forms of the verb. These activities are largely in small groups so that students can work together to negotiate meaning and enhance their own learning.

- Running dictation: Have the students work in pairs. Give each pair the sheet of picture cards. Have the matching predicates individually cut up and taped around the classroom and in the hall. One student acts as a runner, the other as the scribe. The first must memorize a phrase, come back and tell it to their partner who writes it down. Switch roles after each phrase or after halfway. When finished, students work together to match the phrase to the picture.
- Correct the mistake: In pairs or small groups, the students work together to correct one mistake per sentence. You can choose to focus on specific items you have already

covered as a way of recycling or as a test-teach-test diagnostic tool. Prepositions, articles, plurals, and collocations are obvious areas to focus on.

- Find the verb: Give the students the list of predicates but with the verbs removed to a box below the phrases. Working together, the students try and match the verbs to the rest of the predicate.
- Memory: 30 cards, each with either a phrase or a picture, are arranged so that the students cannot see either the words or the drawings. Students work in teams and reveal to the whole class one card. They then try either by guessing, or if they have already seen some of the cards, by memory, to find a match. If they have a match, they can keep those two cards. If they do not get a match, the cards are simply turned back over and the next team has a turn. The team with the most matches wins. A good idea is to play this game on the whiteboard using magnetized pieces of thick paper.
- Peer teaching: If the set of cards was entirely made by the class you are now teaching, have everyone stand up and circulate, teaching their predicate to the other students. A variation on this is when students have to guess which drawing their new partner made, using formulaic questions such as, “Is this one yours?”
- Re-translation: Give the students the list of predicates and have them work in small groups to translate them into L1. On the next day, hand back just the L1 translations and have the groups re-translate their own work back into English. Compare the re-translations with the final work, asking the students to notice where the major differences are in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Ask, “What can we learn about English by looking at these differences?” I have found that if the students have a night to look over

this question and the translations their answers are much more thoughtful and meaningful⁸.

After the activity, it might be helpful to get feedback on how the activity worked for the students; what helped or hindered their learning. The teacher can then use this information to plan future activities that will play to the students' abilities. This feedback will also allow the teacher to explain their reasoning for the activities and will provide a smooth segue into telling the students that they will have a written quiz on Monday. It is important for the students to be aware that knowing this vocabulary will be important in future sessions. Spelling and word order will be marked. With all of the quizzes, I keep a written record of the students' scores as well as their goal for the next quiz which is all announced in front of the whole class. I believe that this accountability motivates the students to work to their potential. Some students or some cultures may not be comfortable with this, especially with having their scores known to everyone and in fact, it violates confidentiality rules in the U.S.! You can bypass this by simply having the students keep their own scores in their journals or lexical notebooks that you can copy and comment on in private.

Also, the cards should be marked in such a way that each set can be separated from the others. The easiest way to do this is have the students use a marker and color the edges of the cards with a different color each week.

Monday: Written quiz

The written quiz is a chance for the students to make personalized decisions about the formulaic sequences. The basic procedure is to give each student a piece of paper that either

⁸ Further advice on these "noticing-the-gap" type activities can be found in *How to Teach Vocabulary* by Scott Thornbury (2002)

asks them to rank, sequence, or categorize the phrases. The belief behind this is that the more decisions a student makes about the vocabulary, the better the chances are that it will be retained. Writing the sequences forces the students to concentrate on form, and the added exposure to the graphic representation of the words should also aid in memory. The order in which they answer is not important. When the students have finished, they can check their work and write down a score. In pairs, they can compare their answers and come up with statements such as, “*Both of us...*” and “*Neither of us...*” This extra comparison should help to elicit the target language, promote critical thinking about their decisions, and create connections between their choices and their real-life experiences. All of this should aid retention.

Some of the ranking and sequencing topics I have used are below:

- List from favorite to least favorite.
- List from most likely to do on your assignment to least likely.
- List from most expensive to the cheapest.
- List the phrases in order of most useful to say in your host country to least useful.
- List from most recently done to what you haven’t done in a long time (or never).
- Create a mind map with all 15 phrases. Explain to your partner how they are connected.

Here are some of the categorizations I have used:

- *I’m going to/I’ll probably/Maybe I’ll/I’m not going to/I don’t know yet if I’ll...on my assignment.*
- *I have...many times in my life, I have ...a couple of times, I’ve never...*
- *I’m looking forward to/I’m not looking forward to/I’m not going to...on my assignment.*
- Friday, Saturday, Sunday

- Positive, Negative, Neutral
- Create your own three categories and list the phrases. Explain to your partner what your choices were.

Tuesday: Communicative tasks

This day is meant to give the students the opportunity to work with the language in a non-threatening but communicatively meaningful way. These activities give the students numerous chances to use the new formulaic sequences often within longer high frequency patterns that should promote oral fluency, with automaticity being the end goal. If Aitchinson is correct and the human lexicon is “a network of associations, a web-like structure of interconnected links” (in Sökmen, 1997, p. 241) then these activities can be used to connect the new language with language they already know, strengthening these associations. This will provide the students with a greater understanding of the new lexis and how it fits into their productive goals (Sökmen, 1997, p. 241). This would also give the students a chance to make the new lexis real, by allowing connections to be made not only to known language but to personal experience, which would again enhance chances for retention (Sökmen, 1997, p. 244). As a wrap-up to the activities listed below, the teacher could lead the students through the language within the sequences, offering alternative collocations and looking at how the various words are functioning within the chunk. These activities “should include much discussion of the words and require students to create justifications for the relationships and associations they discover” (Beck in O’Dell, 1997, p. 277) in order to attain the depth of processing desired for maximum benefit.

What follows is a sampling of communicative activities I have used:

- Surveys: Using their newest flashcards (and perhaps older ones), the students stand and talk to their classmates, trying to gather the information that the survey requires. This can be done as a competition (the first one done wins, the first one to get an answer for each category wins). At the end, the teacher asks the students to repeat some of the surprising or interesting answers they received.

Common topics are:

- Find some who likes.../dislikes.../has gone/done/adapted to...
- To practice verb phrases in various tenses: *Have you ever...? Are you going to ... this weekend? When's the next time you are going to ...?*
- To practice adverbs of frequency or time phrases: *How often have you...? When's the last time you...?*
- Information gaps: Each student or group has a set of information that the other group does not. They must ask the other student or group questions to gather all of the information. Add questions to make it personalized and to practice different tenses and/or gender usages.
- Mill drills: "Mill" means to walk around—so in this exercise, students choose two or three cards that have personal meaning for them. They mill around the room, meet a partner, engage in small talk and then discuss the cards they have chosen, letting the conversation take them where it will. For higher levels, you may want to install time limits or do this as a clover activity with two circles; the outer circle rotates when the time limit has been reached and then new partners discuss again.

- Go fish: This classic game can be adapted to fit any number of patterns and functions. Instead of “*Do you have red?*” it could be “*Have you ever...?*”, “*Are you going to this weekend?*”, etc. A positive response means the person has the card and must hand it over, while a negative response means the interlocutor has to take a card from the center pile. This works great for lower levels and younger learners. For more advanced groups, simply upgrade the language: “*Would it kill you to...?*”, “*Would you mind... for me?*”
- Short skits: Give pairs or small groups 10 minutes to create and memorize a script using a set number of the new formulaic sequences. The groups prepare while the teacher circulates, corrects, and makes suggestions. Groups then perform their skits for the entire class. This works especially well with the phrasal lexemes and semi-fixed phrases.
- Spiel: Elicit any three of the new phrases. Write these on the board and tell the students that they have three minutes to create a 30-second (or 45-second or two-minute) speech they will have to deliver to the whole class using those three sequences in any order. They may take notes on the organization of their spiel but may not read. Each student goes in turn while the teacher takes notes on language use to be discussed at the end of the activity.
- Story charades: Students first work in small groups. One student at a time stands up and performs a sequence of actions representing three or four of the complex predicates. The other group members either write down what they think is being performed or simply tell the student when she has finished. The best ones from each group can perform for the whole class.
- Story making: In small groups, the students design a story using four of the new cards and four of the older cards. Give the students a lot of context to work with, such as “a

true life experience”, or “the terrible day of the JICA volunteer in Fiji”. The students take turns rehearsing the story and then tell it to the rest of the class. Elicit responses such as the most interesting, strangest, most nonsensical stories. Give feedback on the language use, both positive and negative.

- For private students and younger learners, games using poker chips to show correct answers such as Tic-Tac-Toe, Connect Four, and Othello can be played.

There is really no limit to the amount of activities that can be made from these flashcards. Activities from published materials or textbooks can be easily adapted for use with these cards. The point is to make the activity engaging, challenging, and meaning focused. The teacher’s job is to promote chances for fluency building. Error correction should be minimal or done after the activity has finished. It is also good practice to give the students another try at the activity after their language has been upgraded in a fluency-accuracy-fluency cycle.

Wednesday: Oral test of new flashcards

This is a timed oral quiz done in pairs of the latest set of flashcards only. I have the two students face each other with one student being quizzed at a time. When the teacher indicates the start of the test, the first student lifts her first card so her partner can read the English on the back and just using the drawing recalls and says the formulaic sequence. This can be done in either the basic form or in a simple pattern like “*I will..., I won’t...*” For 15 cards, one minute and 15 seconds is usually enough. Students who are especially adept can finish in 30 seconds. The partner who is not being tested has been instructed to be strict about pronunciation and form and can indicate errors by quickly saying, “*No.*” When finished, scores are reported to the teacher

who writes them down. It may be helpful to ask for the students' goals for the next week and which cards gave them the most trouble. I have had incredible success in getting my students to take this activity seriously and they generally put a lot of effort into learning their flashcards. It is important to inform the students that this quiz is not done for the score but to create automaticity and further in the future, the process of segmentation.

Friday: Oral test of all flashcards

The Friday test is exactly like the Wednesday version except it is testing all of the cards, shuffled, in the basic form and with a two-minute time limit. Again, scores are taken and promises made about the students' next effort. A score of 60 cards is exceptional and is performed with very little hesitation or the poor pronunciation that will sometimes happen with faster scores. I usually set a class goal of 45 cards because if the students have the ability to produce that amount then it seems to be fairly automatic. At that rate, students are not taking long pauses or looking at the ceiling as they fight to recall the lexis; it is simply there as soon as they see the picture. I have had students both young and old be able to perform at these high levels although I have also seen instances where older learners seem to be unable to score more than 30-35 in the two minutes. I think it is important to keep this competitive but friendly and if learners are responding negatively to this kind of testing and public scoring then it is equally important to find solutions that work for everyone.

This is a procedure that has taken me years to develop and I suspect that it will continue to evolve over time, especially as I find myself in new teaching situations. The most important thing the teacher can do is be receptive to the class and individual needs. I think that the strength of this program is in both the regularity of the different procedures which give students

something consistent they can be prepared for and also in the great variety of activities that these cards lend themselves to within this classroom thread. My students finish the 10-week program with a collection of 105-120 formulaic sequences that are made up of phrases introduced for their usefulness to the particular group and individual and that are available for automatic productive use. I know of no other method that has this kind of efficiency for the very difficult task of learning vocabulary.

Chapter Five

Final thoughts

Teaching vocabulary through formulaic sequences has been elevated in terms of importance in recent years through the study of large corpora and how language is acquired and used. We now know that those phrases in the back of travel guidebooks can serve a host of benefits for our learners, as can other kinds of sequences. The creative use of flashcards in our classrooms is one very good way to make this learning interesting, challenging, and meaningful. When implementing your own flashcard program, it would be wise to keep in mind this set of best practices:

- Choose some language that will be of immediate productive use: phrasal lexemes commonly used in conversation and semi-fixed classroom expressions. Students will see the reasoning behind such intensive study if they can see quick results. This type of language will also help the students keep conversations going outside of class and that will lead to greater language input.
- Refine student-chosen language to reflect frequency goals, strong collocation, and patterns that students can later draw generalizations from. For instance, if you are working on prepositions, keep records of which prepositions have been included and what their function is within the pattern. Slowly introduce different functions of the same prepositions.

- Introduce a range of flashcard types: L1 translation, pictures, rebus puzzles, keyword images and Nation's word card method for individual words. After practice with all types, let the students decide which types work best for them for different types of lexis.
- Organize the cards and organize the activities to establish a routine that the students can expect. Be creative within that routine to keep the students motivated and engaged.
- Provide opportunities for personalization in both the lexis being studied and how it is studied. This will allow internal connections to be made with both previously learned language and the students' experiences.
- Provide practice in writing and speaking the lexis. This will create further connections that will aid in accuracy and fluency. Regular testing will motivate students by holding them accountable. Set time constraints to force students to produce the language at a faster than normal rate to enhance automaticity. Some students also benefit from the competition or even the desire to please their teacher. Give them this chance!
- Supplement the vocabulary syllabus with an extensive reading program to provide students the opportunity to see the lexis in action, to strengthen connections, and to widen their general lexical knowledge.

Teaching vocabulary deserves a central part in any language program and creating a vocabulary syllabus that takes advantage of the many uses that vocabulary cards offer will allow for intensive and engaging study, and most important of all, a larger and more useful vocabulary. This should lead to better listening comprehension and greater spoken productivity which will in turn lead to more language input, more vocabulary, and better language skills. Vocabulary cards also allow for autonomous study and positive language learning habits that will reward the student far beyond the scope of the classroom.

Appendix 1

April-June 2009 Lexis & Cards

Week 1:

JICA #1

read stories to children
take attendance
pick mangoes with the village children
send e-mails to my family
calculate my living expenses
have a look at community life
prepare materials for class
go diving
take posters down off of the walls
analyze living situations
go over my notes again
build a strong relationship with the native staff
go shopping in the capital
brew rice wine
plant and cultivate the rice

Week 2:

JICA #2

cook dinner for myself
teach a class on Japanese culture
promote the new curriculum
go swimming in the ocean
get married to a local girl
look for technical books relating to
make and show posters about public health
try to make improvements on various (health)
projects
water the plants
sing with the children
settle fights in class
weed the garden
solve difficult math problems
study the local dialect
make up with my girlfriend

Week 3:

Individual set + semi-fixed phrases for discussions

be scared of injections
manage to arrive at the air port just in time
run into my old friend in Palau
insert pictures into a document
turn on a computer
prepare documents before the new system goes live
delete a message from my mail box
retrieve pictures from a USB memory stick
Does everyone agree?
We need to stay focused.
Is that going to work?
Can I see a show of hands?
That's a good idea.
I agree with you in part ...
We all agree on making ...

Week 4:

JICA #3

teach the locals how to grow rice
harvest and sell flowers in the next town
create a new budget
coach a youth basketball team
plan and execute a JOCV math competition
sign up for the internet
provide support to the local staff
adapt my ideas to fit with local practices
play with the village children
discuss class management problems with coworkers
plan for my classes
try and avoid culture shock by _____
let the students know how interesting studying can be
play rugby with the locals
hang out with Tongans

Week 5:*Jica #6 (21.1)*

withdraw 50 Tara from my bank account
 stay up late
 hang out at the beach
 ask my coworkers to recommend a restaurant
 keep a journal (to remember my life in P.N.G.)
 get my locks changed
 avoid mosquito bites
 babysit while my host parents are away
 try to make it on time
 visit a neighbor's house
 take part in a local ceremony
 skype with my friends back in Japan
 do laundry by hand
 have a headache
 rent a flat

Week 6:*Phrasal Lexemes #1*

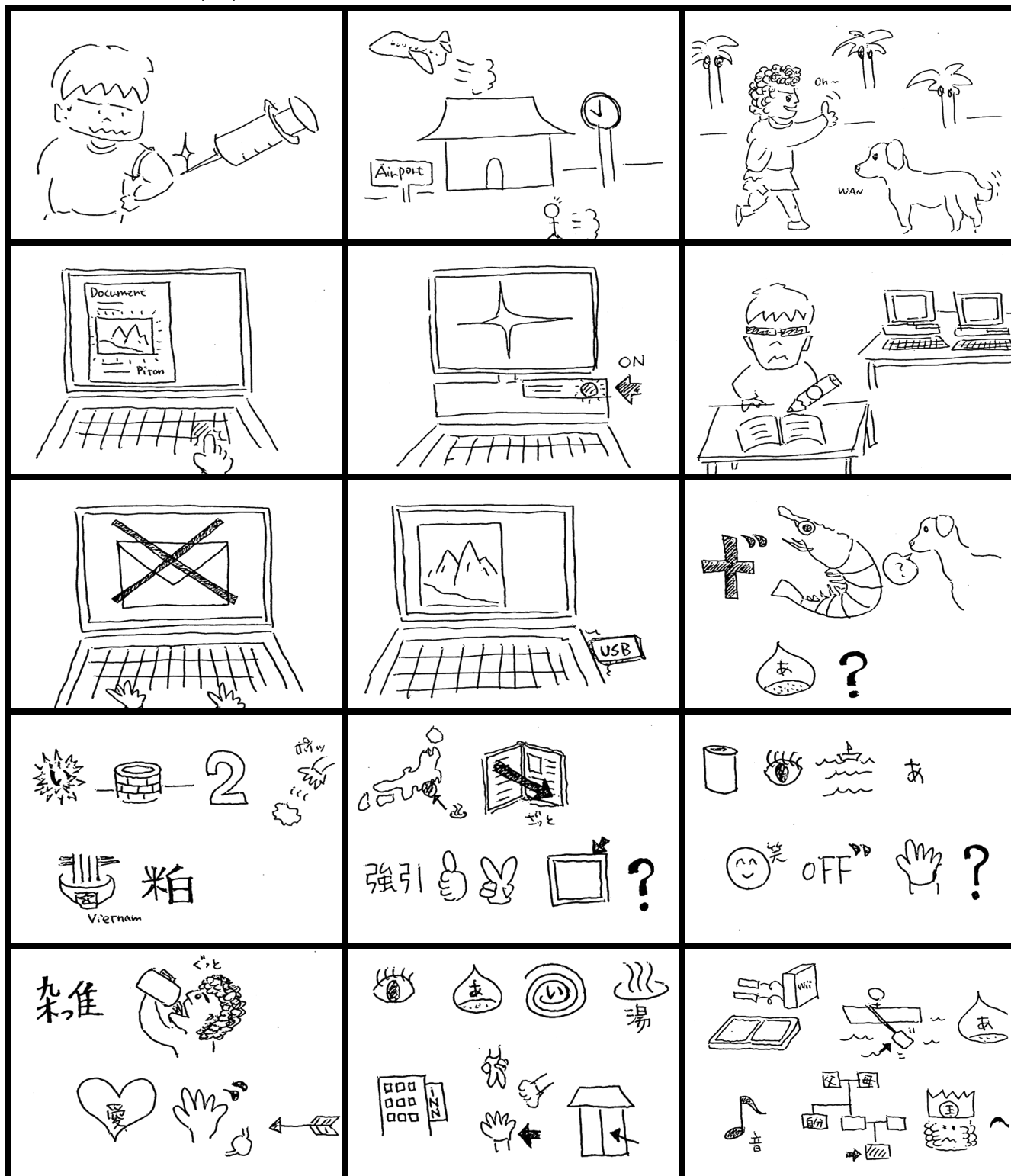
I'm sorry but it's out of the question
 Long time no see
 I've had enough
 That really suits you!
 Get it done
 That makes sense
 Tell me about it
 It's up to you
 What can you do?
 I'll see what I can do
 What are you going on about?
 That figures.
 Can I pick anything up for you?
 I'm not going to be able to make it
 Take your time

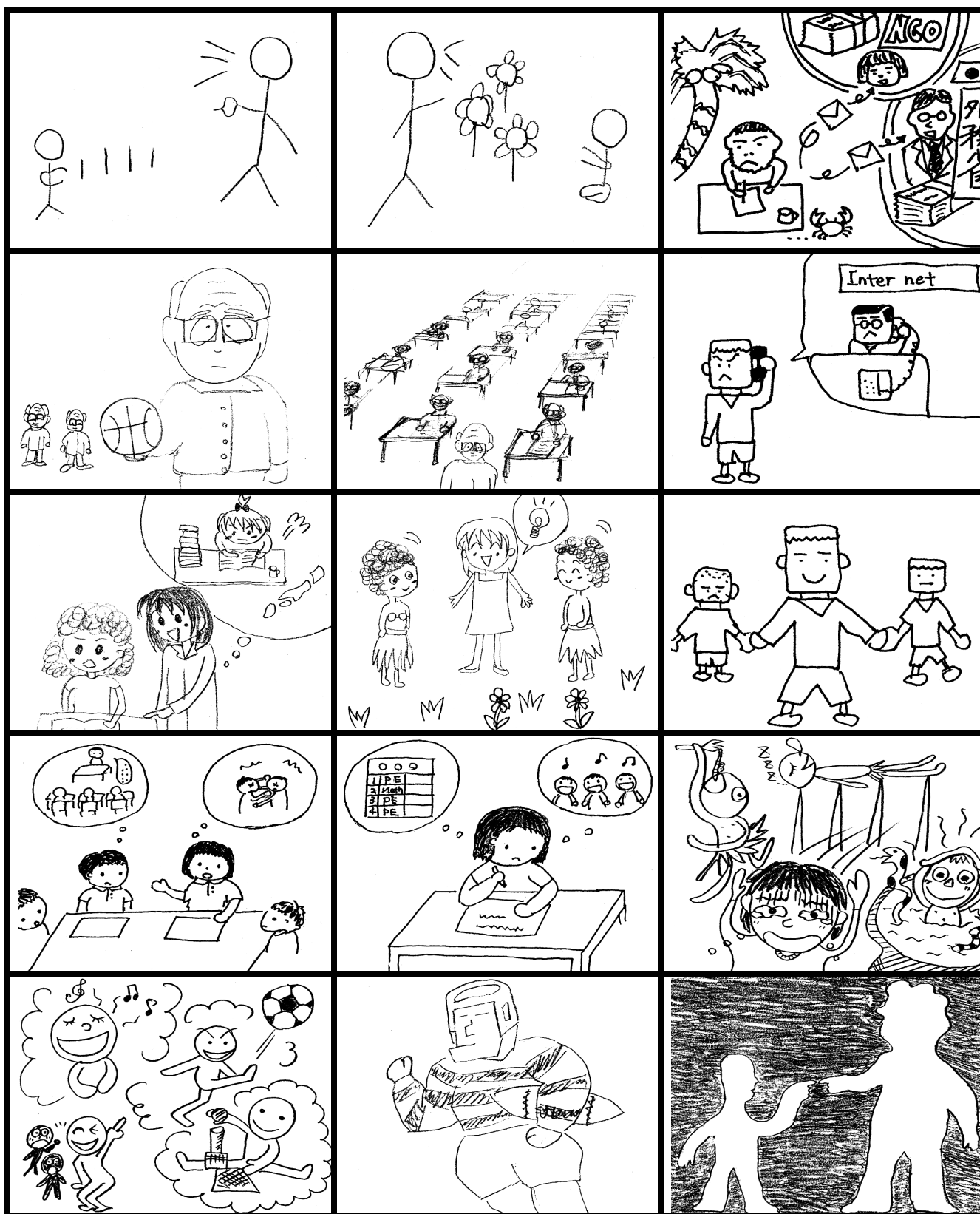
Week 7:*Jica #4*

attend town meetings
 get together with the staff and make posters
 manage the school
 improve on the local ovens
 borrow and use agricultural machinery
 improve on my teaching
 help to get the children changed
 travel around the neighboring countries/islands
 take charge during dangerous situations
 brush my teeth
 write a letter home
 dance to the local music
 fall in love with a local
 drink cava
 get a scuba diving license

Week 8:*A # 7*

study abroad
 go to a festival
 wear a summer kimono
 go to the Fuji Rock Festival
 get a suntan
 change my hairstyle for summer
 take pictures
 purchase a house
 have a barbeque at the beach
 eat some watermelon
 take a crowded train to work/school
 take care of my cat
 upload my pictures onto the web
 update my blog
 listen to the cicadas







Appendix 2

Frequency Analysis for April-June 2009 Lexis

Profiled text

Frequency List:	Current profile	
1-1000 words	78.31%	Cumulative
1001-2000	10.10	88.4
Academic	2.98	91.4
N/A	8.61	100

read stories to children take attendance pick mangoes with the village children send mails to my family calculate my living expenses have a look at community life prepare materials for class go diving take posters down off of the walls analyze living situations go over my notes again build a strong relationship with the native staff go shopping in the capital brew rice wine plant and cultivate the rice cook dinner for myself teach a class on japanese culture promote the new curriculum go swimming in the ocean get married to a local girl look for technical books relating to make and show posters about public health try to make improvements on various health projects water the plants sing with the children settle fights in class weed the garden solve difficult math problems study the local dialect make up with my girlfriend be scared of injections manage to arrive at the airport just in time run into my old friend in palau insert pictures into a document turn on a computer prepare documents before the new system goes live delete a message from my mail box retrieve pictures from a usb memory stick does everyone agree we need to stay focused is that going to work can i see a show of hand that is a good idea i agree with you in part we all agree on making teach the locals how to grow rice harvest and sell flowers in the next town create a new budget coach a youth basketball team plan and execute a jocv math competition sign up for the internet provide support to the local staff adapt my ideas to fit with local practices play with the village children discuss class management problems with coworkers plan for my classes try and avoid culture shock by let the students know how interesting studying can be play rugby with the locals hang out with tongans withdraw number tara from my bank account stay up late hang out at the beach ask my coworkers to recommend a restaurant keep a journal to remember my life in get my locks changed avoid mosquito bites babysit while my host parents are away try to make it on time visit a neighbor house take part in a local ceremony skype with my friends back in japan do laundry by hand have a headache rent a flat i am sorry but it is out of the question long time no see i have had enough that really suits you get it done that makes sense tell me about it it is up to you what can you do i will see what i can

do what are you going on about that figures can i pick anything up for you i am not going to be able to make it take your time attend town meetings get together with the staff and make posters manage the school improve on the local ovens borrow and use agricultural machinery improve on my teaching help to get the children changed travel around the neighboring countries islands take charge during dangerous situations brush my teeth write a letter home dance to the local music fall in love with a local drink cava get a scuba diving license study abroad go to a festival wear a summer kimono go to the fuji rock festival get a suntan change my hairstyle for summer take pictures purchase a house have a barbecue at the beach eat some watermelon take a crowded train to work school take care of my cat upload my pictures onto the web update my blog listen to the cicadas

Appendix 3

Sample of flashcards survey

Survey!!

Yasuko, dispatched to Samoa in June 2009.

1. How often do you speak English? (once a week, never, etc)

* Every day

If you speak English every day, how many hours do you speak it?

*Maybe 15 minutes total

2. What are your goals for speaking English? (survival only, I want to speak like Andy, etc)

*I want to speak anything fluently what I want to say.

3. Rate the following statements from 1 (not true for me) to 5 (very true for me):

The vocabulary cards were:

1. Enjoyable	1	2	3	④	5
2. Challenging	1	2	3	4	⑤
3. Useful	1	2	3	4	⑤
4. Boring	①	2	3	4	5
5. A waste of time	①	2	3	4	5

Could you briefly explain your answers to #3 and #5?

#3: I've used some chunks daily, and some of them come up my mind and help me when I get stuck

#5: That really helps me a lot especially automatic English speaking. To tell the truth, it's not automatic yet but when I want to say something, the picture comes up my mind and my mouth moves.

4. Have you continued studying your vocabulary cards in your host country? How often?

* Yup, it depend on my feeling but at least once a week.

5. Did you continue to make vocabulary cards in your host country? If yes, how many?

*No

6. How many of the cards we studied in the class can you remember?

* I'm not sure, but I remember almost. But these are the things that I couldn't remember.

Improve on waste collection techniques.

Help to get the children changed

Babysit while my hostparents are away

7. How many of the phrases do you use in your daily life? Can you give an example?

*many many

e.g., hang out, get stressed about, let me know sth, stay at home,
have a look at sth...

8. Which cards were the most memorable for you? Why?

Let me know sth,

Because I have to confirm daily schedules so often! Sometimes they say
to me only "Let's go" just before they leave!

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